algebra of file naming system

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AI Overview

The "algebra" of a file naming system treats a filename as a structured equation: an ordered sequence of discrete metadata components (C_i) joined by specific delimiters (D). By arranging tokens from most to least significant, you create a predictable, machine- and human-readable string. Harvard University +2

$$\text{Filename} = C_1 D C_2 D C_3 \ldots \text{ext}$$

You can learn more about general core structures through guides like the Harvard Data Management File Naming Conventions.

Core Components and Operators

- **Components (C_i):** Independent metadata tokens such as date, project ID, creator, and version.
- **Macro-Delimiter (D):** A character used to separate distinct components. Standard operators are the hyphen (`-`) or underscore (`_`).
- **Micro-Delimiter:** Internal casing rules (like `camelCase`) used within a single component if it contains multiple words.
- **The Terminal Operator (`.`):** A strict separator used exclusively before the file extension. Never use interior periods. Harvard University +4

Rules for Constructing the Equation

- **Positional Significance:** Place the most globally unique or frequently sorted criteria on the far left (e.g., date or project code).
- **Zero-Padding:** Use leading zeros for numerical indexes (e.g., `001` instead of `1`) to preserve proper lexical and numerical sorting order.
- **Standardized Dates:** Enforce an ISO-compliant chronological format like `YYYYMMDD`.

- **Character Restrictions:** Restrict the alphabet to safe ASCII characters: Latin letters (`A-Z` , `a-z`), numbers (`0-9`), hyphens, and underscores. Harvard University +3

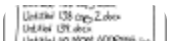
Syntax Example

$$\underbrace{20260606}_{C_1:\text{Date}}_\underbrace{PROJ01}_{C_2:\text{Project}}_\underbrace{report}_{C_3:\text{Description}} - \underbrace{v01}_{C_4:\text{Version}} .\mathbf{pdf}_{\text{Ext}}$$

- **Result:** `20260606_PROJ01_report-v01.pdf` NNLM (.gov) +1

8 sites

File Naming Conventions | Data Management



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A logical and well thought through **file naming convention** enables others (and yourself) to easily locate files. Read more

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File Naming | Research Data Management

File names should be machine-readable: use alphanumeric characters with snake or camel case, and don't have spaces or special characters. File

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